

Residential Study Group (RSG)
December 13, 2018
8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.
Arlington Town Hall, First Floor Conference Room
MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Mike Ciampa, Bill Copithorne, Wynelle Evens, Pat Hanlon, Kelly Lynema, Steve McKenna, Pasi Miettinen, Kathy O'Rourke, Jenny Raitt, Erin Zwirko

Guests: Steve Makowka, Wendy Ritcher, Don Seltzer

After a round of introductions, Erin provided an update on the survey to review the effectiveness of the Good Neighbor Agreement. Erin provided a copy of the survey and a list of addresses that were reviewed with Inspectional Services. Wynelle asked about including a question in the survey about the finished product of the home. Steve McKenna indicated that the open-ended questions would provide an opportunity for a respondent to provide any other comments about the finished product. There was general agreement that a specific question about the final product should not be included.

The Study Group discussed the addresses identified and found that it was a good spread of locations.

The Study Group agreed that the survey should be released in January and should be open for two months. There was some discussion about a pre and post reminder postcard.

The Study Group then moved on to discuss the report. Erin and Kelly provided an overview of the report and the recommendations. In general, the report recommends that the Residential Study Group might want to pursue residential design guidelines through requesting an appropriation from Town Meeting to hire an architect. Additionally, the Historic and Cultural Resources Working Group with the assistance of a consultant is completing a Survey Master Plan that would identify recommendations to prioritize historic preservation efforts in the future. This information could help identify an adjustment to the demolition delay bylaw.

The following items were discussed relative to the report:

1. The benefits of a date (for year constructed) certain versus a rolling date (such as 75 or 50 years old) in the application of a demolition delay bylaw.
2. Wynelle did not want to dismiss all regulatory changes to address residential development.
3. The Study Group discussed how affordability is defined in the report. The report uses the thresholds established by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and used in the Housing Production Plan as described in the Chapter 40B framework rather than what might a community might consider affordable. What might be affordable to one person may not be affordable to another, and a tighter regulatory process does not impact affordability. The Study Group discussed how the housing

inventory in Arlington has been decreasing over the study period of the report which could be reducing affordability, and Steve McKenna indicated that he could provide that information. The Study Group generally agreed to continue using the HUD definition of affordability as a standard.

4. Pat questioned the degree to which the Town wants to prioritize buyers over sellers in the adoption of new policy. Several members of the Study Group agreed that they want to avoid the unintended consequence of reducing a homeowner's anticipated equity gained in their home over their tenure in a property by enacting policies that could devalue properties in certain zoning districts.

Pat asked about the overall mission of the Residential Study Group as attached to the warrant article from Special Town Meeting in May. There were a number of items that were referred to the Study Group and the report does not cover all of the topics. Pat wondered if the report was ready to send to Town Meeting without a review of the other items that were referred to the Study Group. Jenny indicated that the report is based on the scope of work that was approved by the Study Group in June after a discussion of all of the issues that were referred by Town Meeting. Jenny indicated that demolition delay is a tool for historic preservation and is not related to affordability. The review presented in the report led back to a recommendation for design guidelines but the staff would review the other items in the Town Meeting referral to look at the issue from other dimensions.

Wynelle suggested that the Study Group should bring something to Town Meeting in the spring. The Study Group might want to consider expanding the special permit process to demolitions and reconstruction beyond the large addition provision. Jenny asked Erin to provide an overview of Wellesley's Large House Review, which she administrated while employed by the Town of Wellesley. Erin explained that certain thresholds were established for each residential zoning district, and if a structure was proposed that exceeded the threshold, the proposal would be subject to Large House Review under the purview of the Planning Board. Erin explained that the purpose of Large House Review was not to deny homes, but to review the proposal in light of certain community-adopted standards. Erin also noted that most of the applicants were homeowners rather than developers because of the time and money involved in completing the review. Erin noted that there were many homes built right up to the threshold to avoid triggering this review process.

The Study Group discussed other aspects of design review, and how to insert design review into a process to review demolitions. The staff indicated that additional information about design review boards would be collected for the Study Group including the make-up of a committee, the process, and examples from other communities. A draft warrant article should also be presented in advance of the warrant closing on January 25, 2019.

Pat suggested that the public should be invited to a presentation of the final report so that residents can weigh in on recommendations prior to Town Meeting.

On the meeting summaries, Steve McKenna made a motion to accept the meeting summaries. Wynelle seconded. All those in attendance voted in favor of approval.

The upcoming meeting dates were scheduled: January 3 at 8:30 AM and January 18 at 8:30 AM.

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